

BOOK NOTICE

On reading the taxonomic descriptions or other works of a fellow entomologist I often wish I knew him, or at least knew about him. A knowledge of his background of home, schooling, and travel should make it easier to realize to a shade the meaning of what he writes. But it is actually the more personal facts I wonder about: has he a sense of humor, is he a happy, friendly soul? His technical articles are not likely to tell me this.

Perhaps you have corresponded for years with another enthusiast, enjoyed each letter fully; at last you meet, and talk for hours and hours. Thereafter each message has read into it a rich personal coloring, put there half by you. This, one can do with the living. Is it possible to have equal pleasure in writers of the past? I think so, but only in ratio to our feeling for the personalities behind the words.

True, there are usually obituaries for reference, though they tend to be merely laudatory, to itemize dates and accomplishments. Far better are the unrehearsed letters sometimes found in print. Read those of E. A. Schwarz to his friend H. G. Hubbard (Jour. New York Ent. Soc., Sept. 1929); it is not necessary to be a coleopterist or even an entomologist to enjoy them. Who can fail to get a vivid picture from this: "When I came to the box containing the 'Cioid' and looked at the latter I came near being paralyzed and it required a superhuman effort and a swallow of whiskey to recover. Your Cioid turns out to be a most remarkable and entirely new genus of Scolytids!! . . . the specimens were at once exhibited and Hopkins became perfectly wild with excitement and cursed his miserable West Virginia Scolytids because they did not show any distinguishing characters except after a most painful scrutiny."

There are other examples which give the human and interesting side of a naturalist, notably in the writings of Harry B. Weiss and Herbert Osborn, but they are all too few.

The excuse for these comments is the publication of a second edition, revised and enlarged, of S. W. Geiser's fascinating book "NATURALISTS OF THE FRONTIER" (University Press in Dallas, Dallas 5, Tex. 296 pages, frontispiece, 11 maps. \$5.00). The volume is dedicated to the memory of Jacob Boll, whose likeness appears in the front. Chapter I is introductory; the subjects of the rest are as follows: II, J. Boll; III, J. L. Berlandier; IV, T. Drummond; V, J. J. Audubon; VI,

L. C. Ervenberg; VII. F. J. Lindheimer; VIII. F. Roemer; IX. C. Wright; X. G. Lincecum; XI. J. Reverchon; XII. G. W. Belfrage; XIII. Notes on Scientists of the First Frontier [chiefly of S. Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee]; Appendix A. Principal Sources of the Foregoing Chapters; B. A Partial List of Naturalists and Collectors in Texas, 1820- 1880; C. Incomplete List of the Author's Publications on the History of Science in Early Texas.

Each study traces in detail, with many quotations from old letters, the naturalist's life and work, travels and troubles, in Texas. Much background material is given, as well as follow-up data about those who did not stay. The essays are factual, yet delightfully easy to read, and their writing was preceded by many years of research and correspondence. Be it noted that all the naturalists, except perhaps Audubon, collected beetles, some intensively. To get them they travelled widely, not as we now do by car on paved highways, but on foot or by horse, alone, with Indians, or with the army on boundary surveys; for those were the days of bottomless mud roads, of floods and of fever, all in a frontier country.

Entomology in the United States and Canada has made its greatest strides in the past 75 years. There is a real need for capturing in print the personalities of the men involved. Many who knew them well are authors of repute, and can tell the stories if they will. But the essence is "do it now", for in another 20 years data can be gathered only third hand, and it will be ever harder to know where legend has distorted fact.

If a historian is a true research student, a critic and analyst, and has a sense of humor to boot, his audience is fortunate indeed. More writing like that of Dr. Geiser's is needed. Dry biographical statements are essential in any history of entomology, but a leavening of first hand accounts and personal idiosyncrasys may decide whether future students will read in drudgery or for pleasure.—HUGH B. LEECH, California Academy of Sciences, San Francisco 18, Calif.